

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current NYC & LA Entertainment Scenes

New York Theatre Openings This Week

Two's Company- Alvin 12/15/52. James Russo and Michael Ellis present Bette Davis in the new musical revue by Charles Sherman, directed by John Murray Anderson...
The Grey Eyed People- Martin Beck 12/17/52. Albert Selden presents a new comedy by John D Hess. Featuring Walter Matthau, Virginia Gilmore and Sandra Deel. Staged by Morton Da Costa...
The Children's Hour- Coronet 12/18/52. Kermit Bloomgarden presents Lillian Hellman's 1935 hit play. Featuring Patricia Neal, Kim Hunter and Iris Mann. Directed by the author.

Digests of Current NY Theatre Reviews- late reviews inside

I've Got Sixpence- Barrymore 12/2/52. Weekly reviewers had nothing but unkind words for John van Druten's first serious script presented by Gertrude Macy and Walter Starcke. Most welcomed newcomer Viveca Lindfors as an actress to watch, and most okayed performances by Vicki Cummings and Edmund O'Brien. But most thought religious discussion became too confusing. Hobe, Variety, who noted that religious plays have small commercial appeal at best, called script murky and stubbornly disappointing. Francis, Billboard, doubted if few would find the play worth the sum mentioned in the title, while Shipley, New Leader, suggested spending the coin elsewhere. Gibbs, New Yorker, panned everything including the scenery. Latter by Boris Aronson he found as untidy as the script; while he thought leads turned in a stilted cinematic job. Keating, Cue, joined the critical pan wagon by stating that author presented a worthwhile theatre idea with neither power nor coherence. Newsweek man agreed with those who found slight enjoyment in the love scenes, but also agreed that the religious segments were cloudy. Time critic thought serious moments better than author's attempts at humor. All critics stated or implied that van Druten would do better if he stuck to comedy.

See the Jaguar-Cort 12/3/52. Short lived drama by N. Richard Nash panned by all of the weekly critics. Time reviewer summed up unanimous negative opinion by stating that script and stage was seethed with action, pulsed with meaning, all of which added up to nothing. Arthur Kennedy managed to hold his own in a part that would have thrown a lesser man, Newsweek man commented. Symbolism of author could be figured out with a certain amount of eclectic effort, he added. Billboard's pew-sitter marked evening off as dreary, futile business which only made him wonder how the star got himself involved. Hobe, Variety, is sure that stage martyrs must be articulate, and this one wasn't. Nash's trouble, suggested Gibbs, New Yorker, was that elaborate imagery and verse form he chose to employ called for talents still beyond his reach. The result came near to nonsense. Cue's critic rated producer-designer Lemuel Ayres star of the evening for his effective sets. WCBS Bill Leonard thought entire germ of play would have been better expressed in a few sentences. While WFUV Bob Kass don't recall seeing so much useless physical movement onstage since the last trouble of Japanese acrobats played the Palace.

Out of Town Tryouts

Margaret O'Brien hasn't found the proper vehicle in The Intruders, a new drama by Edwin Bronner, presented by Eddie Dowling and John D MacArthur, Waters, Variety commented after the Philadelphia debut of show. Play builds from weak first act, but falls apart in third. Producers face titantic task in making the highly charged climax seem believable, he predicted. Show is due in NY in January.

' Off Broadway '

Peggy Phillips, press agent, new play To Charlie, With Love tried out at Columbia Theatre Associates for 5 performances...Princeton Triangle Club's 61st musical Ham 'N Legs at Hunter College Dec 23-24...Ken Parker will produce Three in One, a new musical at Jan Hus House in Feb...Equity Library Theatre presents Winterset Dec 17-21. Theatre de Lys is in process of complete reorganization, and plans to open in the near future with Sodom, Tennessee. Burgess Meredith may direct. Regular admission plan will replace club idea...Manhattan College Players presented first American performances of London hit Last Page by James Hadley Chase...Four for Tonight, quartet of playlets present weekends at Bown Adams Professional Studio...American Savoyards, formerly known as Masque and Lyre Light Opera Company have so improved on tour, praises Rice, Post, that their NY fans won't know them when they return, The Mikado, shown at Plainfield, NJ, shows how the group has developed into a more closely knit unit and in better singing form than ever.

' Vaudeville '

Current Palace show includes Felo Bergaza and Bruno Tarraza, Cuban pianists; Don Hooton, cowboy; L.B. Fields, the Savoir Faires, and Jelly Roll and Zuzu...Jack Carter heads new Paramount show...Roxy's enlarged ice stage will be used Dec 21 by Sonja Henie for her appearance on CBS TV Ed Sullivan...Quinn, Mirror, rated Palace bill headling Harry Savoy as one of the house's best. Joe Lombardi, orchestra leader, rates bow for his handling of intricate musical cues...Music Hall holiday show drew split notices from trade paper critics. Nativity pageant, seen for 20th year, is up to usual high standards. Francis, Billboard, okayed "Season's Greetings" revue, especially satirist Nip Nelson who scored in large house. Kahn, Variety tabbed revue a potpourri of season that couldn't stand without the religious pageant.

' Yiddish Theatre Notes '

Folksbine, Yiddish acting group, opens 39th NY season with The Sambatyn, a folk comedy with music by Abraham Goldfaden. Show will run for 16 week ends at Radin Auditorium, 128 Stanton St, NYC...Girl of My Dreams, musical with score by Joseph Rumshinsky opens Christmas week at Second Ave Theatre...Leo Fuchs is starred in The Hired Groom, musical, at Hopkinson Theatre, Brooklyn...British producer Gordon Brooks has bought English rights to My Lucky Day, now shown at Second Ave Theatre. Musical will be translated into English...Herman Yablokoff, producer of Uncle Sam in Israel given testimonial Dec 17 at Public, honoring his 25th year as director and producer in Yiddish theatre...Blintzes and Screams, new revue at Jacobs' Parkway Theatre, enjoyed by Wilken, News, Radio Aces trio steal the show. Critic noted that show might have a bit more Yiddish in it to keep the old timers coming...Uncle Sam in Israel, now being presented in English at the Public, drew mixed opinions, Strassberg, Mirror, and Sheaffer, Eagle, found musical enjoyable in English, as it was in Yiddish. Translation should help it find the wider audience it deserves. But Shanley, Times, and Rice, Post, didn't agree. Former noted that Yiddish laugh lines which remain in script were the most popular, while latter thinks they should have left well enough alone.

' Green Room Department '

MISCONTEXTED ADS...Producers in their mad optimism often have great trouble reading and understanding a review, Watts, Post, explains as the logical explanation why he was misquoted in Time Out for Ginger display ads. Critic admits he used words modest, friendly and disarming in his original review, but that is because he considers the play so amateurish it is difficult to get angry at it. To make himself clear to all concerned Watts added play is also dull, foolish, almost frantically commonplace, and a little embarrassing.

FIRST NIGHT PROBLEMS...Two's Company, scheduled to open Dec 15 promised an exciting opening if critics had not been invited to first performance. Sylvester, News, reveals that a backer of show promised to punch any critic who showed up uninvited. Variety notes that Atkinson, Times, had been assigned to musical's opening by his managing editor, while News would have sent a reporter to cover the opening night. Present plans call for reviewers to cover Dec 15 opening.

COLUMN TIPS...Lionel Stander will have a lot of explaining to do after his smear of drama reviewers on WOR, NY, Henry Morgan show, reports Gardner...Some of the members of New Faces orchestra are hunting for new jobs, Kilgallen whispers...Bette Davis threatened to sue those who said she really didn't have "laryngitis", hints Wilson...Katharine Hepburn slammed dressing room door in critic's face, notes Farrell.

US vs FOREIGN...American theatre is a theatre of motion while the foreign theatre is one of words, forum members at Greater NY Chapter of ANTA monthly discussion agreed, Times reports. Foreign audiences are not so much interested in what happens to a character as in what the latter feels in his emotions and pattern, Dr Felix Ibanex, Latin American theatre reporter stated. US has the best actors and the best methods of production, but US theatre can't put on what the people want because of the lack of a subsidy, Katina Paxinou said.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...7 PM curtain plan can never succeed without unanimity, explains Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun..."Main Street to Broadway" film sequence of NY opening night to be authentic should include the formally dressed gent who straight-arms you at intermission, suggests Watt, News...New NY theatre might include parking of car, table d'hôte dinner at nearby restaurant, efficient hat checking, comfortable seats, between the acts bar, and convenient supper club for after the show, designer Jo Mielziner outlined to Hewes, Saturday review.

NEW GENERATION...Fact that every section of the country virtually demanded representation on ANTA's governing board indicates conclusively that there is in all sections an already aroused and militant interest in the theatre, comments, Burr, Playbill. A new generation has been developed that knows and loves the theatre, and even takes a large part in active theatre work in its far-flung home towns. Heartening and exciting theatre pilgrimage organized yearly by Nadel, Columbus Citizen is proof of this.

' Theatre News Round Up '

See The Jaguar closed after 4 performances...Buddy Ebsen, Nancy Coleman and one other actor take over leads of The Male Animal Dec 21. Regular cast due back in 2 weeks..."Drama Desk" Dec 15 meeting features "Paying Off Party" honoring return of investment to Wish You Were Here backers. Joshua Logan, Arthur Kober, Shelia Bond, Patricia Marand and 8 singing chorus girls will be guests of the NY drama editors and reporters organization...

' LA Theatre Notes '

Katharine Cornell production of The Constant Wife arrives in LA March 16...
Cornelia Otis Skinner's Paris '90 plays 10 days at Biltmore starting Christmas Day
..."18 Actors" new repertory group includes Victor Jory, Morris Atkrum and Don Porter
...Finian's Rainbow produced at Los Angeles City College...A Church Mouse closed
at Hide-Away Theatre, Glendale...Jacqueline de Wit replaces Ann Doran in Carthay
Circle's Affairs of State...Family Portrait presented at Glendale Center Theatre
given ideal production, praises Von Blon, Times. Most of cast shared plaudits, though
critic did note that one lead failed to fathom depth and beauty of character of
Mary Magdalene...Carousel Theatre's version of HMS Pinafore played with fine weather
eye for comedy and tempo, okays Von Blon, Times.

21st annual Christmas play, Las Posadas, staged by Mexican Players at Padua Hills
is as delightful as ever, LA daily critics agree. Reddy, Examiner, tabbed 6 year old
Yolanda Alba as star of the evening, while entire cast performs up to usual standards.
...Theater of Today's debut at Las Palmas with Philip Barry's The Philadelphia Story
won little better than "A" for effort, critics marking off production as lifeless.
Greene, Herald Express, noted production by radio and TV players was not bad enough
to be raxing, nor good enough to be rewarding. Swisher, Mirror, added that many of
situations gone flat with protracted exposure. Mannered crudities of cast were no
more convincing than their graceless elegance, she panned...Pasadena Playhouse pro-
duction of Stalag 17 okayed by Bongard, News, though not as incisive as Ferrer ver-
sion. Cast varies in ability, but will play together better after more rehearsal.

' Late Reviews '

Whistler's Grandmother-President 12/11/52 If one good actress could
turn a poorly written comedy into a hit, most of the NYC critics would
have okayed Robert Finch's new comedy presented by Anthony Parella. Josep-
hine Hull won rave notices, while script was panned by all. Atkinson, Times,
and Sylvester, News, were almost ready to recommend show on star's perfor-
mance alone, but they had to agree with colleagues who found script unfunny
and boring. Hull needs a playwright, Times critic pointed out, half as sub-
lime as she is, and Finch is not in that class. Kerr, Herald TRIBUNE, sugges-
ted that Council of Living Theatre see to it that Hull is kept working stead-
ily, for she is one of country's most endearing actresses. Sylvester also
picked out Peggy Nelson for her fine comedy performance. Producer was credited
with at least constantly encouraging new talent by Coleman, Mirror. The play
is one of those that has to be seen to be disbelieved, notes Watts, Post.
Except for star other players have little material and their efforts are
pretty uniformly doomed, pans Hawkins, WT&S. Why, asks McClain, Journal
American, was the play put on in the first place. Leo Kerz realistic sets
won praise from most of the critics.

